Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

Volume 17 | Issue 2 Article 10

4-1-2000

Dombrowski, ANALYTIC THEISM, HARTSHORNE, AND THE CONCEPT OF GOD

Séamus Murphy

son in order to make room for faith.

While I cannot agree with Hare's attempt to displace the line between faith and knowledge, he makes an impressive case for returning this issue, as well as the problem of the moral gap, and the question of the Christian roots of Kant's ethics to prominence in philosophical and theological discourse.

NOTES

1. Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson, (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 32 (37), cited in Hare, p. 53.
2. Hare, p. 24, his emphasis.
3. Hare, p. 24, n. 28. Cf. Aristotle, NE 10. 7, 1177b26-34.
4. Hare, p. 69.
5. Hare, p. 69.
6. Kant, *Religion*, 49 (53), 83 (88), 47 (52), 108 (117).
7. Hare, p. 57.
8. Kant, *Religion*, 67 (73), cited in Hare, p. 57.
9. Hare, p. 59.
10. Hare, p. 60, cf. Kant, *Religion* 107 (117), 132 (141).
11. Kant, *Religion*, 48 (53) cited in Hare, p. 64.
12. Kant, *Religion*, 40 (44), cited in Hare, p. 60.
13. Hare, p. 70.
14. Hare, pp. 92-94.
15. Hare, pp. 88-90.
16. Hare, p. 103 citing Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press, 1989).
17. James Griffin, *Well-Being*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), cited in Hare, p. 128.
18. Hare, pp. 129-30.
19. Hare, p. 131.
20. Blaise Pascal, *Pensés*, A. J. Krailsheimer, trans., (New York: Viking Penguin, 1966), Section 1, VII, p. 65
21. Hare, pp. 166-9.
22. Hare, p. 170.
23. Hare, pp. 170-2.
24. Hare, p. 253.
25. Kant, *Religion*, 189 (201), cited in Hare, pp. 273-4.
26. Hare, p. 274.

Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God by **Daniel A. Dombrowski**. State University of New York Press, 1996. Pp. xi, 247.

SÉAMUS MURPHY, Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy

Process philosophy's approach to issues concerning the existence and nature of God has not gained much acceptance from analytic theist philosophers. Daniel Dombrowski's book should go a considerable way towards generating more interest among analytic philosophers and, hopefully, recti-

fying that neglect. Taking the concept of God as the focal point, the author presents Hartshorne's development of it in ways that are engagingly addressed to the concerns and intuitions of classical and analytic philosophical theism. The author achieves his goal in large measure: at least, he has made this reviewer more sympathetic to the process approach to God.

Dombrowski draws attention to the fact that, while the debates concerning the existence of God and the epistemological possibilities of reasoning to it have been long and extensive, little attention has been paid to the importance of conceptual issues concerning the nature of God. While there was a period earlier in this century when positivistic emphasis on the verifiability criterion led to a debate as to whether words such as "God" could have any meaning at all, that phase appears to be largely over, as a result of its becoming apparent that the great bulk of our theoretic concepts would also be jeopardized by that line of thought. Hartshorne's focus on the concept of God has been to a different and more fruitful end.

As Dombrowski notes, the concept of God can be seen to be central to the epistemological debates: determining whether God exists will typically be affected by one's notion of what it is whose existence is in question. An impassible and unchanging creator must, by virtue of those qualities, be unrelated (except in an external, residual way) to his creatures. While there are cogent philosophical reasons for holding such a concept of God, it fits badly with the image presented in Judeo-Christian-Islamic revelation. Monotheism presents God as intimately involved in human history, loving all he has created, treating his rational creatures as free moral agents with a capacity for knowledge of and perhaps friendship with their creator, and hating evil and injustice.

In addition, the concept of an impassible God presents epistemological difficulties: if one can't be related to God, so much the harder to claim even the minimal involvement of knowing or being able to know that he exists. The process approach makes it easier to make sense of the religious claim that God's nature is partly relational and that in a certain sense God can even be said to need us. While process philosophy is not beyond challenge, it does have some strong cards to play in these areas. At the outset (pp. 8-9), the reader is introduced to Hartshorne's matrix of possible positions with respect to God and the world being respectively necessary or contingent. Hartshorne's own position was that both necessity and contingency are predicable of God and of the world. The claim that God, whose existence and most of whose properties are necessary, may have some contingent qualities is not unattractive since it accommodates the idea that God can and does relate to us. The author deals with the reasons for rejecting classical theism's view that God is not in any respect contingent, and shows the desirability of ascribing certain attributes to God (such as the ability to develop through relationship) which, while at variance with monotheism's traditional view, we would find admirable in human beings.

On the other hand, the claim that the world is non-contingent in certain respects is less attractive, since it removes God's freedom as regards choosing whether to create. This can perhaps be more accurately understood as simply the claim that God's existence as cause makes a world of some sort inevitable or necessary. However, the claim that some world necessarily

exists does not entail the proposition that this world necessarily exists. It was disappointing that the author did not clarify Hartshorne's reasons for holding that this world must in some sense be necessary. The more attractive position where God is both necessary and contingent, and the world purely contingent, is apparently not acceptable to Hartshorne and his followers, yet no reasons are given for not adopting it.

The first three chapters in this book are the most important, dealing respectively with divine immutability, the commitments of Hartshornian dipolar theism, and divine embodiment. As regards the first of these, the classical assumption that it is better (or more perfect) to be unchanging rather than developing, emotionally unaffected than experiencing emotion, self-sufficient rather than related and hence dependent, is shown for what it is: an assumption, with limited justification. Given the fact that our language about God is inevitably anthropomorphic to some extent, so that the admirable or perfect qualities of God are human characteristics extrapolated *ad infinitum* and projected onto the divine, it seems reasonable enough to suggest that they should be seen as context-dependent. Self-sufficiencey is admirable in some contexts and not in others. In certain contexts, receptivity and sensitivity can surely be good-making or admirable qualities, just as much as steadfastness and endurance in other contexts. While receptivity and sympathy appear to make God contingent in certain respects, there are good grounds for accepting this contingency as an enrichment of our concept of God, a 'magnification' of the Lord. Introducing contingency and relationality (to created reality) into God will produce as well as solve philosophical problems; but every philosophical option has some drawbacks.

Dombrowski does a good job of surveying the relevant literature for comparative purposes, and of drawing together the main points in ways that are helpful and informative. Thus, the views of Swinburne, Plantinga, Alston, Creel, Gunton and others are discussed in ways that indicate the different positions it is possible to hold on these matters. Making God contingent in certain respects is entailed in holding that God is affected sympathetically by his creatures, but this does not imply that God is in any way inferior to anything or anybody else, or surpassable by anything other than himself. The Hartshornian idea is that divine becoming can be more inclusive, more all-embracing than divine being.

Chapter two, where the issue is whether Hartshorne's process philosophy can achieve a balance between God as active and God as receptive, contains important material. In particular, he uses Plato's remark in the *Sophist* (247e) that to be real is to have power, and to have power is to be able to affect other things or be affected by them. If the disjunctive 'or' is taken in an inclusive sense, it can be argued that part of the fullness of being is to be receptive and capable of being influenced. There is a serious question as to whether viewing God as a non-relational being does not, so to speak, lessen God's fullness. One outcome of the process view is a more favourable attitude to the idea that God acts by persuasion rather than by compulsion. Critics tend to assume that this denies efficient causality to God, with final causality masquerading as efficient causality. This too is dealt with in an interesting way.

The next chapter turns to the question of whether and in what sense God can be said to be embodied, and uses the views of Swinburne for comparison. It is an enlightening treatment of a complex topic in a brief space. The roots of Hartshorne's views are traced back to Plato, where the idea of God as the World-Soul is first developed. The discussion of this point, making clear how important Plato is to the process view of God, is stimulating. Connections are also traced to figures such as Plotinus and Origen, and similarities to some of Leibniz's ideas are also noted.

Hartshorne's panentheism commits him to the position that the world is in some sense a part of God. One reason for holding this is to render coherent the religious claim that God knows us, our world and our predicament. Since these are contingent realities, and since knowledge must be internal to the knower, that would make something contingent internal to God. The arguments in support are presented clearly. Objections to the claim that immateriality is entailed in perfection are treated at some length.

The claim that there must be a world if God is to be omnibenevolent was not supported to any great extent; Swinburne's point that there is no overriding reason for God to make a universe is dismissed a little too quickly. The assumption that God cannot be relational unless there is a material universe with embodied beings for him to relate to seems forced; and the brief remark (p. 89) in this context about the doctrine of the Trinity does not do it justice, philosophically or theologically. In addition, the claim that God's creation is not *ex nihilo* is an important point of difficulty which should have been discussed. Chapters 4 and 5 are less important, since they focus more on the views of other writers, such as William Alston, for purposes of comparison to the process approach.

The final chapter, considering the implications of a process concept of God for moral issues, was the weakest and least convincing. In the case of abortion, I doubt if the classical (non-process) notion of God is a significant causal factor leading "to a misguided opposition to the moral permissibility of abortion" (p.6). In general, people's moral intuitions are rarely determined by their concept of God. In this instance, causal influence (if any) is much more likely to run in the opposite direction, since people feel far more passionately about the right to choose or the right to life than they do about the appropriate concept of God.

Perhaps the value of the author's discussion of abortion is that it raises questions about process philosophy's concept of personal being and identity; there seemed to be weaknesses on this point that were not apparent in earlier chapters. The beauty of the Hartshornian concept of God was that it seemed broad enough to be able to accommodate our intuitions about both the substance and the process dimensions of God's being. Something similar is needed as regards the story of what it is to be a human being before the insights of process theism can be applied to ethical theory. In addition, the notion of process needs further clarification. While some processes are simply processual, like the process of going bald, others are such that they embed a determining event, e.g. the process of becoming pregnant. Any application of process theism to issues of being a person or having personal identity, as well as to ethical issues, must deal with the latter kind of

process. Ethical theory in particular cannot lightly take it that the notion of process can replace the notions of event and act.

Reflections in the Mirror of Religion, by **Ninian Smart**. Edited by John P. Burris. Macmillan/St. Martin's Press, 1997. Pp. xiii and 237. Cloth $45.00.

CHRISTOPHER KEY CHAPPLE, Loyola Marymount University

This work gathers several essays written and published by Ninian Smart during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Ninian Smart, the 1998 President of the American Academy of Religion, helped establish two premier departments of Religious Studies, at the University of Lancaster in England and at the University of California, Santa Barbara. These essays contain reflections on four decades of Smart's study and teaching of world religious traditions.

The editor, John Burris, has grouped these essays into three categories. The first several essays probe the great metaphysical questions that undergird the study of world religions. What is the nature of religious experience? Can an experience of pure consciousness be achieved? Does the mystic enter into a realm held in common with members of other faith traditions? The second group of essays explores the sociology of religion in India and China for the past two hundred years. Smart discusses the differences between the South Asian and East Asian responses to colonialism and seeks to explain the unqiue pespective of Theravada Buddhism, particularly in Sri Lanka. In the third and final section of the book, Smart examines practical issues pertaining to the study of religion at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and ends on the optimistic note that interreligious understanding will help promote world peace.

Smart's philosophical approach to the study of religion might be characterized as liberal, open-minded, optimistic, pragmatic, and somewhat perennialist. Though Smart has for decades worked at a full articulation of the geographic and historical distinctions that set religious traditions apart from one another, his analysis discerns two primary modalities of religious thought. The first, and more common, asserts a transcendent presence that determines and shapes the course of human life, at least in matters of ultimate concern. The Abrahamic Monotheisms (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) fit this typology, as do Hinduism and certain strands of East Asian thought, particularly as found in the moral absolutism of the Confucian tradition and the cosmic Buddhahood of the Mahayana. However, according to Smart, Theravada Buddhism, with its negation of an abiding soul, puts forth a model of religiosity that requires its own category. While not exactly nihilistic, the Theravada nonetheless shows no interest in the pervasive theological concerns of the other traditions. By focussing on the heroic control of the mind through ethical observances and meditation, Theravada remains a reluctant partner for dialogue with other faiths because of its reluctance to name as deity its concept of transcendence.

In discussing religion and modernity, Smart compares and contrasts Maoist Marxism (which he considers to be religious) with the Neo-